

R?... R?...

THE CAMEROON BLITZ

ISS #01

a buck fifty



ALSO IN THIS EXCITING ISSUE:

Video Game Books From The 80's
The Latest From Geeky Gill Bates
Sega's "Pengo" for the Genesis
Revs of all four "Star Trek" series
...and much, much more!

2nd
JESS CREATIONS*, Co.
PUBLISHING



THE GAMEROOM BLITZ #01
WINTER 1997



Lettitor From The Editor...

EDITOR:

Jess Rogan

HEAD ARTIST:

Jess Rogan

CONTRIBUTORS, ETC.:

Alan Lonoie
Galen Komatsu
Russ Perry, Jr.
Mike Palisano
Josh Lesnick
Sean Kelly
Chris Kohler

THE GRB MASCOTS:

Jypsky Shirnion
Byron J. Lisamen
Boshi Tonook

SPECIAL THANKS:

Rick Berman
Mike Pillar
The Cast of DS9
Sego (for oncel)
Brian Pacula
Marshall Stowe
Sean Kelly

PUBLISHING TOOLS:

Microsoft Publisher
Microsoft Windows 3.11

ON THE COVER:

Avery Brooks and the staff of "The Gameroom Blitz" invade "Star Trek: Strategic Operations Simulator". And you thought the Jem H'Dar were scary...

Hey, I'm back! And it only took me a year to get here... I can't believe it's been that long since the last issue of "Concept" hit mailboxes. No, no... there's no need for a standing ovation... I'm as excited to be back as you are to read this. Whether that's a good thing or not remains to be seen, but in any case, I'm here, reinforcing the long-held belief that the first issue of any EG fanzine sucks, and annoying the hell out of any human who dares read this with my excessive use of fonts and my "storm-petrel" attitude (no, I don't know what the hell that means... ask Anne).

Enough anyway, to quote Ross Perot's vapid ex-running mate, "Why am I here?" It's a long story, really. As you may or may not know, "The Gameroom Blitz" has been on-line for nearly a year, and while I'm satisfied with its content, even the newest update (at <http://lonestar.texes.net/doki/grblitz...> by the way, thanks for the server space, Josh!) doesn't have the dynamic flair of a 70's street pimp, or for that matter, my now deceased paper fanzines "Project Ignition" and "Concept". This alone was almost enough to convince me to return to EG fandom, but the clincher was seeing the third generation of fan-edz (Chris Kohler, Kevin Cline, Al Riccielli, Jon Ralcliffe... have I missed anyone?) come into their own as accomplished writers.

So, what do I intend to accomplish with this, the first of many (?) "Gameroom Blitz'es? Well, as you can tell from the cover, this is a special science fiction edition covering Sego's many versions of "Star Trek: Strategic Operations Simulator". I'll also take a look at all four "Star Trek" television series, Microsoft's latest software, and some pop culture video game books from the fabulous SC's, and for you traditionalists, there's a letters column and some (outdated) fanzine reviews as well. It's all sure to please (somebody, anyway...), so by all means check it out and tell me what you think. No, really. I mean it. I'm getting sick of reaching into my mailbox and pulling out nothing but cobwebs and irate spiders. If you've got any comments at all about this issue, and want to see more of them, you've gotta send me mail, folks. Anyways, enjoy...

Jess Rogan. Irregular Guy

STAR TREK

STRATEGIC OPERATIONS SIMULATOR

And now for our feature presentation, "Star Trek: Strategic Operations Simulator". This rare Sega gem was never especially popular in arcades despite the tie-in to the successful series of movies, and it's not hard to understand why: the play mechanics were derived greatly from the hundreds of "Star Trek" simulators available on home computers, and the format (highly simplified though it may have been) didn't go over terribly well with a generation of arcade goers weaned on such intense classics as "Sinistar" and "Defender". Nevertheless, Sega released several home versions of the game (hey, when you have a license like "Star Trek", you don't waste it!), leading us to the reviews on this page. Special thanks are extended to Michael Blanchet of the now defunct "Electronic Fun and Games" magazine for his review of the 2600 version of ST-SOS.

ATARI 2600 (REV'D BY MICHAEL BLANCHET)

Although Sega's home version of "Star Trek" is a dead ringer of its coin-op inspiration, its introduction into the already glutted home market is academic at this point in time. Most gamers, no doubt, have already had their fill of similar first-person outer space shoot-em-ups such as "Starmaster", "Phaser Patrol", "Star Voyager", and "Star Raiders". "Star Trek", to say so, treads on some very tired ground.

Unlike the four aforementioned games, "Star Trek" features three different displays, all of which appear on the screen at the same time. The uppermost section of the playfield is a third person overview of the entire sector. To the left you'll see an information center complete with graphs that measure such vitals as shield strength and power levels. Finally, running along the bottom of the screen is the cockpit view of the sector as seen from the bridge of the Enterprise. Here is where you'll face the Klingons eye to eye.

Although this three screen arrangement looks sophisticated and high-tech, it detracts from the game's playability. The sector map, in my opinion, shouldn't be displayed at all times. Theoretically, it is there for reference purposes only, but since it dominates the playfield, one cannot help but to look at it. In my case, I only glanced at the first person screen periodically. Why? All the action is on the third person screen. The first person screen then is a useless appendage in this game.

In any game that tries to call itself "first person" a certain degree of depth of field is to be expected. "Star Trek" has none to speak of as the Enterprise cannot really fly far as it is locked on a fixed altitude. Since this is the case you only need to align yourself with a Klingon ship and move toward it.

Fans of the arcade game and Trekkies will no doubt go bonkers over this cartridge. Be forewarned though—a joystick is substituted for the responsive array of buttons and knobs found on the arcade version. To me the choicest stick over knob seems senseless since

altitude never varies. Turns are executed by moving the stick either left or right while thrust is initiated by pushing the joystick forward.

This is one game that hopelessly straddles the fence between first and third person contest. Unfortunately, it succeeds as neither.

COLECOVISION

Hey, it's all the fun of the first "Star Trek" without the bad acting, cheesy special effects, and William Shatner's rampant blidol! What more could you possibly ask for? But seriously, folks, this is one neat TV game. It's not as flashy as the Vectrex version of "Star Trek", but that's fine because this is a closer translation of the elusive Sega coin-op, color vector graphics and all.

In case you weren't swayed of this from reading Michael Blanchet's review of the 2600 version, "Star Trek: Strategic Operations Simulator" is a fairly diverting hybrid of "Asteroids" and the millions of "Star Trek"-inspired strategic simulations that were popular in the early 80's. The interface in particular is highly reminiscent of those primitive text-based games, with a view screen in the top right corner and the Enterprise's current condition on the left, but thankfully, the tedious task of entering parameters has been replaced with real-time battles which require quicker thinking and reflexes.

As for the play mechanics themselves, they're nothing special, and surprisingly simplistic for a game with the "Star Trek" license. You scoot around, pick off Klingons, dock with space stations, and confront the mine-laying marauder NOMAD at the end of each sector... that is, until the Klingons get wise to you, turn on their patented "Star Trek™" brand cloaking devices, ram the hell out of your ship, and saunter on home to Quidobah with Captain Kirk's smoking toupee as a reminder of their victory. As is the case with far too many ColecoVision games, your death is guaranteed in the later rounds of "Star Trek" since the enemies either triple in speed or quantity, making the game literally impossible.

The game fares better visually,

however. Beneath the view and status screens is a window that acts as a Kirk's eye view of the action. Engage with a Klingon warship and an impressively drawn Bird of Prey looms just ahead of you. Move left or right and your view of the ship shifts accordingly. Fire a few shots its way and the craft goes supernova in an explosion not unlike those in Japanese cartoons. The aural accompaniment makes quite an impression as well... the sound effects range from pleasantly weird to mildly annoying, but the theme music that begins and ends each game is worth the price of admission for die-hard Trekkies. "Star Trek" is head and shoulders above other overhead space sims for the ColecoVision, but if you're not a fan of the show, you probably won't like this much either. Anyone who's even mildly interested in the series would be wise to purchase or at least download the game from the Internet, however... it's great. "Star Trek" memorabilia, and best of all, it's much more fun than most games that have carried the license (like "Star Trek: Deep Space Nine: Crossroads Of Time", for instance... phew! Who stepped in that one! But, err, I digress...).

VIC-20

I probably shouldn't have expected much from this conversion. I mean, don't get me wrong... programmers like Jeff Minter, Scott Adams, and (to a lesser extent) Tom Giner have pulled some pretty wild rabbits out of the VIC-20 before. The problem is, none of them had anything to do with this translation, and the programmers who did obviously weren't interested in making this game as good as it could have been. It appears to be a complete translation of the arcade original—everything from the first-person viewpoint to the "Star Trek" theme is intact—but there's just no flair to the design, making it nearly as disappointing as if there had been elements missing from the arcade version. Also, the graphics are downright primitive in comparison to the ColecoVision version of "Star Trek", and the slowdown in later rounds is just horrific. It's a pity, really—the VIC-20 had shown up

Coleco two times with its conversions of

"Gorf" and "Omiga Race". Could a version of "Star Trek" comparable to Coleco's have been possible if Sega had hired the right programmers for the job? The world may never know.

TI/994A

It would appear that there's a lot going for the version of "Star Trek"... since both the TI/994A and ColecoVision have similar Z-80A processors, you'd expect the game to be almost identical to Coleco's outstanding translation. And "Star Trek" even supports the TI/994A's optional voice synthesizer, which in theory would only add to the illusion of hearing the Enterprise. Unfortunately, what works in theory falls apart in practice... this conversion of "Star Trek" is nothing like Coleco's, and the aforementioned voice is more distracting than helpful. You'd expect it to sound like Majel Barrett's, since she has after all been the voice of the "Star Trek" computers since the series premiered three years ago, but that's just not the case. Instead, Sega opted to use a generic voice with a vaguely masculine tone & pitch, and because it sounds nothing like any of the "Star Trek" cast members, it could just as easily have been left out. In fact, this could have given the programmers more time to improve "Star Trek's" unattractive graphics and sloppy, imprecise gameplay, as both are well below the standards set by Coleco's translation. So in the end, it's obvious that there's a lot less going for the TI version of "Star Trek: Strategic Operations Simulation" than one would expect...

VECTREX

This is the oddity of the bunch. GCE claims that this is "Star Trek: Strategic Operations Simulation", yet it's nothing like the coin-op. That's especially strange since the Vectrex is the only system capable of a truly faithful translation of the game... Nevertheless, if you were a fan of the "Star Wars" coin-op by Atari Games, you'd probably enjoy "Star Trek's" flaky 3-D freewheeling and extraordinarily detailed enemies. My only real problem with the game is that there's no exploration involved... you can aim freely at the various Klingon and Romulan warships that attack, but because no stars fly past your field of view, it feels as though you're anchored in place. So much for boldly going where no man has gone before... Also, the music was apparently ported from other Vectrex titles, without a note of the "Star Trek" theme which made the other games that much more fun to play. Despite all this, I'd recommend the Vectrex version of "Star Trek" over the more accurate but lackluster TI/994A and VIC-20 translations in a heartbeat. If you own a Vectrex, you haven't seen all that the system can do until you pick up a copy of "Star Trek".

STAR TREK

THE SERIES

STAR TREK

DEEP SPACE NINE

Captain: James T. Kirk... a man who (despite his speech impediment and thinning hair) is quite popular with the green space babes.

Coolest Crew Member(s): The only logical choice is Spock. Leonard Nimoy's portrayal of the eternally level-headed Vulcan is pure genius.

Lamest Crew Member(s): Probably Sulu. He sounds more like a radio sleepy than a starship officer. And what's with that name? Sure sounds Japanese to me.

Best Episode: What else? "The Trouble With Tribbles".

Poster Quotables: Hey, this is the series that made such staples as "Scotty, beam me up!" and "IT'S DEAD, BUT IT'S DEAD!" household phrases!

Memorable Moments: The bad special effects! I don't even think the Power Rangers would scoop so low as to face off against the dorky reptile in "Arise".

Weird Cameos: The guy who played Lurch popped up in one episode as a towering robot.

Sale Predictions: The lowly red-shirted ensigns will die approximately five minutes after touching down on any given planet's surface. 80% of the cast members from "Star Trek" will blow up like balloons and/or undergo celebrity psychic lies.

Tricorder Reading: The series had to start somewhere, but "Star Trek" wasn't as revolutionary as *Star Wars*. The good Trekkers would have you believe, if it weren't for the films, "Star Trek" would have suffered the same fate as other carry-over sci-fi science-fiction shows.

Captain: Benjamin Sisko, who has played two roles in the series: an introspective commander struggling with the death of his wife and his role as the Federation liaison to "Deep Space Nine", and a captain with almost as much personality as the razor he uses to shave his head.

Coolest Crew Member(s): Quark, the conniving, over-the-top, and his archrival Odo, played to perfection by René Auberjonois. It's also partial to Quark's nephew Nog.

Lamest Crew Member(s): Without a doubt, Quark's brother Rom. He's probably the most incrementally written character in "Star Trek" history.

Best Episode: "The Visitor". Although you know how it's going to end, you can't help but feel for Jake Sisko (brilliantly played by both Garret LeBeau & Tony Todd) as he lies crumpled around him.

Poster Quotables: It's not even a word, but Odo's guttural "H'mum!" gets me every time.

Memorable Moments: Quark's got some mean one-liners in "Body Parts", and that weird gesture where he wraps his forearms around his head (when Odo just barely escapes getting blown to bits) totally eliminates the alienisms from "Home Alone".

Weird Cameos: First Omega's Jan (the Jen H'dar leader) was also Link from "The Mod Squad".

Sale Predictions: Expect a plot twist within 20-30 minutes after the show begins. Quark will always concoct a scheme to make profit (illegally), which Odo promptly foils.

Tricorder Reading: Action, adventure, drama, humor... there's something for everyone to appreciate in "Deep Space Nine". Its widespread appeal comes at a price, however... it's too easy to guess what will happen next.

THE NEXT GENERATION

Captain: Jean-Luc Picard, the stiff, bureaucratic Francophile (with a British accent) who first made headlines as a fashion snarver.

Coolest Crew Member(s): Smart-alecky engineer Geordi La Forge, and of course, Commander Dea, the android who despite a high intellect just doesn't understand the mechanics of human social behavior.

Lamest Crew Member(s): The crew could just as well have done without whiny empath Deanna Troi and bratty ensign Wesley Crusher.

Best Episode: The Q episodes are the most fun, although I'm dying to see the one where Quark faces off against Worf.

Poster Quotables: There's always "Make it so", but my favorite's got to be where Worf commands a crew member's wife to "have your (her) baby immediately".

Memorable Moments: Some of the special effects are just mindboggling, especially for a series which began in the late 80's. Also, who could forget Q's gift to Data? **Weird Cameos:** Whoopi Goldberg's role as Guinan could be the best acting performance of her career.

Sale Predictions: Picard will always, always, flirts like the diplomatic guy out of a situation. **Tricorder Reading:** "Star Trek: The Next Generation" single-handedly justified the franchise and turned a lot of "Star Trek" haters into bonafide Trekkers. The pace of most episodes is a little plodding in comparison to "Deep Space Nine's", however.

VOYAGER

Captain: Kathryn Janeway, the arms specialist with a hair bun that would make Princess Leia wince and a voice straight out of "Gone With the Wind".

Coolest Crew Member(s): The (yet unnamed) Doctor is basically just a sarcastic relic of Data, but he is nevertheless entertaining.

Lamest Crew Member(s): Kes, Kim, Chakotay, etc. etc. **Best Episode:** The one where Janeway defeats the very embodiment of fear. Definitely one of the best endings ever in "Star Trek" history.

Poster Quotables: Janeway to Kim: "You're in Starfleet, Mr. Kim. Weird's part of the job."

Memorable Moments: Who disappointed I was with the series after watching my first episode.

Weird Cameos: The guy in the first episode was none other than Spagney from "Laverne + Shirley".

Sale Predictions: When given the chance, the crew will always do something incredibly stupid (ie negotiate with treacherous body harvesters to get an antidote for Janeway, who can survive without it).

Tricorder Reading: "Voyager" is gotten better, but it still feels like a mediocre attempt to capture the essence of "Star Trek: The Next Generation".

James Tiberius Kirk

Main Bridge

NSS Enterprise NCC-1710



Post Office Paranoia!

The Minty Fresh Taste of Minter...

RE: "I don't know why you never bothered to respond to my E-mail (couldn't, were too busy, whatever)..."

Well, sometimes it is impossible to deal with all the mail I get. When I got back from England recently I had 200+ mail items. I have a job I have to do as well, 'ya know...

RE: "I enjoyed 'Gridrunner' very much. It's one of the best VIC-20 games I've ever played."

Glad you enjoyed "Gridrunner". I do not have any problem with people doing versions of the (Llamsoft's) games provided that they are for free, non-profit distribution. Llamsoft does, however, retain the rights to all commercial implementation of Llamsoft titles.

Cheerz...

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(-)
/
(Yak, aka Jeff Minter)

I've been in Landom for a number of years and this is the first letter I've just received from a professional game designer. Ain't that cool? In case you weren't aware, Jeff is the creator of both "Tempest 2000" and "Defender 2000", the games that put the Jaguar on the map (literally...), as well as a variety of titles for older computers such as the legendary Commodore VIC-20. I'm debating whether or not to start work on a clone of one of his best games for that system, "Gridrunner", and his blessing has made that decision a little easier, despite the condition that I distribute it free of charge. Not that that's a big deal, since nobody has to this willing bothered to register my last two games... :) In any event, it's great to hear from someone who many consider to be a legend in the industry. Thanks for the

response, Jeff, and here's to a speedy release of "Attack of the Mutant Camels" for PC compatibility!

And Now, "23 Questions" ... With Your Host, Chip Palisano!

Jeet:

- Q: Have you heard from Sean Pettibone lately?
- Q: What's the deal with you and Landom? In Out?
- Q: Have you ever smoked crack while reading EGM?
- Q: Have I changed my mind about Nick Des Barres?
- Q: What do you get when you cross "The Laser" with pineapple juice?
- Q: What the hell happened to "Intelligent Gamer"?
- Q: What is scam-artist Todd Capriotti up to these days?
- Q: What is Yak-boy REALLY up to?
- Q: Is S&M freak Ben Leatherman still alive?
- Q: Is Vanilla Magazine?
- Q: Vanilla Magazine?
- Q: Vanilla Magazine?
- Q: Why does the Internet suck?
- Q: What if God were a hippie? Would all the right-wingers who denounce those "pot-smoking liberals" shoot themselves when they started playing "Grateful Dead" tunes instead of "Amazing Grace" at Sunday mass?
- Q: Is celebrity status getting to rotomani Jeff Minter's head?
- Q: How would "Next Generation" be different if it were written by walruses?
- Q: If Acclaim falls and no one hears it, what sound does it make?
- Q: I heard that Aaron Budner is holed up in a little wood cabin somewhere writing a 50,000 word essay that he will blackmail EGM into printing. What have you heard? Are his nails REALLY 8 feet long?

- Q: Why is your last name (on the Internet) listed as Dawson? Are you pulling a Tabitha Paige on everyone, or did ex-"Family Feud" host Richard Dawson marry into the family?
- Q: Speaking of the much-maligned Ms. Paige, whatever happened to Pat Reynolds, anyway?
- Q: If you read "Video Magic", do you think the word "Ludite" is accompanied by a picture of Frank Polosky in the dictionary?
- Q: Eric Longin's favorite "Splice": Why is he doing S+M cover IN C O L O R ?!
- Q: Is Eddie Van Halen NUTS? The guy from EXTREME!!!!

Just a few Qs to ponder while gazing at your navel.

Michael Palisano

My, aren't we inquisitive? From the top, we have...

- A: No (not that I'm complaining...)
- A: As you can tell, I'm an Innie
- A: You have to smoke crack before you'd WANT to read EGM
- A: NO (and yes, I realize you were asking yourself the question...)
- A: Laser-Sevent brand hard candies, now with real fruit juice!
- A: I'm guessing the losses of Ziff-Davis dumbered it down because their target demographic no longer comprehend periodic intelligence.
- A: Up to his neck in debt, I hope
- A: He wouldn't tell me
- A: If so, would that make him Ben Leatherman's handoutman?
- A: I prefer chocolate
- A: Strawberry
- A: And mint chiffon
- A: Obviously, we haven't been using NetScope, have we?
- A: Clinical studies prove that mail/vana mutates normal brain cells into those commonly found in liberals
- A: Could be. But the demise of Atari could have an equally humbling effect
- A: Hey, it wouldn't be the first time a walrus edited a professional game magazine
- A: Who cares as long as they don't get back up
- A: Not essay...manifesto
- A: It's my biological father's name. Haven't had the guts to legally change it, but I'm sure that will change one of these days...
- A: He's putting the finishing touches on a new fanzine (I've seen the rough draft. So far, so good...). You'll have to ask him about Paige
- A: Duh... what's a "Ludite"?
- A: What is with you and S+M, anyways?
- A: It doesn't matter who's the lead singer... "Van Halen" did suck, currently sucks, and always will suck.

Gee, it looks like I've got space to fill. Um, uh... how about that Tyson/Holyfield fight? I guess the critics were right when they said "the day Tyson loses a match is the day Michael Jackson has children!" Anyway, thanks for your interest in GRB... and my navel.

Little Miss Danger Russ...

(From an on-going E-mail conversation)

Oh, you're going over 640K (when programming "Super Pac-Man")?

I don't know that for certain, I doubt it. My guess is either 1. My computer's losing its marbles, or 2. I've been nesting too many CALLED subroutine modules.

Well, every subroutine needs some memory to save the state of the computer as it was before being called, so it can return properly. That could push you over 640K in theory. Or, if QB is like some other languages, you should have a separate code, data, and stack space. If you're not at 640K yet, you can up the stack space (big assumption though).

OK, I wasn't following before, but I think I understand what you're talking about in regards to subroutines... QB treats modules like entirely different programs, treating all variables as unused unless you tell the computer to pass variables to other modules with DIM SHARED, so I can see why the computer would have to memorize what went on in the main module before entering the subroutine module so it could return to the main module safely (yep, well). But I have no idea how to split the data, stack space, and source code separate. This really sucks since I've discovered that the Quick BASIC compiler and overlay linker refuses to work with any program larger than 64K, not 640K as I'd suspected (I'm assuming that uncompiled programs are restricted to 640K). This became apparent when I'd tried to compile the latest version of "Pac-Man" ... I had to trim all the unnecessary left left behind when the program was "Super Pac-Man" just to get it to fit within the 64K limit set by the compiler. So much for adding sound card support...

The drawing [of myself as a Klingon... see the editorial doesn't really look like me, but then again, Armin Shimerman doesn't really look much like Quark, either.

Like how John Tesh didn't look like Tesh in Klingon gear?

John Tesh as a Klingon? Now THAT is scary. Lemme guess... he drives hiscores to suicide by playing his latest CD instead of hacking them to bits with a ball bat?

...and I managed to miss the one where Dix and Worf sleep together. Thought I saw that coming, but wasn't sure it would ever happen.

You missed "Looking for Par'Mach" in All the World Placers! If that was one of the best D39 episodes of the season! Very amusing, which was a nice change of pace after the non-stop action of the season premiere and 100th

episode. Bashir's reaction to Quark and Grik's romantic encounter was priceless! "I'm no longer asking anyone any questions. They'll come in, I'll treat them, and that will be that..."

Hey, if I didn't want characters who got along, I'd watch the "Voyager" pilot over and over. Well, maybe the first half.

And in the next half, they probably hugged and kissed and every damned conflict was resolved in the last ten minutes of the show just like it always is on "Voyager"...

That's kind of what happened. They set up a lot of possibilities of tension only to pretty much ignore it from then on.

That just figures... geez. If you ask me, that's even more proof that "Voyager" was never necessary in the first place. And speaking of "Voyager" bashing, here's the king...

Alan, The Lanoie Man...

...thanks for the cover! I forgot I even asked you to draw one, and I still needed a cover idea when that arrived, so I'm glad it came when it did. Not to mention that I actually had forgot(ten) to slam "Voyager" until I saw that cover... heheh. Oh, and on the subject, I'm glad you like it [but, it's diverting, but "like" may be too strong a word...ed.] but I don't think I ever can. I don't even want to get started on "Voyager", it always makes me mad. At least you said it was "tolerable", not good. With that, perhaps I can agree...

...if you checked out my web page you discovered it sucks... I just don't really care. As you said, it's a hassle to make a web page, but I just find it boring. I love C, BASIC, etc., but HTML, JAVA, blah blah blah... boring. I still use Netscape 1.1. Why? Because all those frames are annoying as hell! Press the back button and you don't go back a frame... you go back a site. But alas, Netscape is the only browser worth using.

... "Super Pac-Man" rocks! The graphics are great, and I especially love the "free for all" option. Nice job! One thing you might want to add: all the ghosts come straight toward you all the time. How about giving them a random movement every few blocks to stop that?

Yes, I actually downgraded to Win95 (place a year before this one here; it doesn't matter which, as the name of this operating system was only realistic for a few months, if that). The reasons were of practicality: 1. The little bit of 32-bit code that Win95 uses makes it a lot faster than Win3.1 in terms of Windows applications (yes, it's actually

faster, if you have the RAM)... The interface sucks, yes, and Explorer [Internet or Windows! -ed.] is the shittiest thing this side of DIR.W (cut and paste? WTF is that???)... but nothing stops me from using Win3.1 applications IN Win95, which I do, and they are faster.

...What? D39 may be nearing an end? ...if it gets carried because of anything to do with "Voyager", you'll be seeing my homicidal raging face on tomorrow's headlines, trademark intact. "Crazed Killer Sees 29 Paramount Executives to Death: Leaves Note: 'I'm Voyager'"

And on this joyous note I now end this letter:

Alan Lanoie, who wonders if Internet Phone will ever catch on

Sorry your letter ended up looking like Frankenstein, Alan, but I'm having a difficult time squeezing this issue into 14 pages as it is! Here's what I's got to say in response... 1. JAVA sucks. You can download, zip, and run a clearly superior MS-DOS game in nearly the time it takes to load and play some mediocre "Space Invaders" rehash programmed in JAVA [if it loads at all, and that's a big if], and don't even get me started on JAVA animation... 2. It's been my experience that Win 3.x runs faster and more reliably on networked PCs than Win95. And while older applications may run faster on Windows95, Win95 excludes like "Microsoft Exchange" and the first version of "Microsoft Internet Explorer" are very slow and/or poorly designed. 3. As for "Super Pac-Man", thanks for the compliments. I've given the monies personalities in my latest game "Pac-Man", so be sure to check that out. 4. I don't remember whether Armin (Shimerman, TV's "Quark") said that next year or next season could be D39's last. In either case, re-runs could tide me over in a pinch, but considering the fact that I've already seen many of the episodes over a three times, I'm not sure how long they'd stay satisfying. And you're right... "Voyager" (or, as that Reynolds likes to call it, "Gilligan's Island" in outer space) would be a poor substitute. I wonder how long I'll be before they show episodes of that on "Mystery Science Theatre 3000"...? Anyway, thanks for the letter, Alan, and do keep in touch!

If you've got something to say, why not say it here? The next issue's theme will be "Classic Video Game Remakes", so send letters of comment about that topic to...

POST OFFICE BALANCE
C/O JEFF LANOIE



'ZINA

Warrior Newsletters

THE RATINGS SYSTEM:

- Must-Read
- Good Stuff
- Not Bad
- Caution...
- Don't Bother
- This Sucks!

THE DARK SIDE #12

AL RICCIARELLI JR.

Released in October, this issue of "The Dark Side" doesn't really have a Halloween focus, but Chris Kohler's highlighting "Earthbound 31 Now for the NES" announcement on the cover is enough to scare the pants off the most courageous gamer. Inside is a very nasty review of "Earthbound" for the SNES, and while Al's statement that "It's the worst game I've ever played for any system" isn't entirely accurate (he obviously hasn't played "Star Ship" for the 2600, or "Dark Castle" for the Genesis, or "Super Pitfall" for the NES...), it is pretty amusing nevertheless. Also submitted for your approval is Al's omnipresent wrestling report, an engaging account of his life as an upperclassman in high school, and best of all, a letter from yours truly (twicked grin). TDS #12 isn't as sharp as previous issues, but all in all, it's still worth the clam and a halt. ☺

Above + Beyond #6

Tom Donoho

Well, Tom's 'zine is no longer so blatantly "inspired" by Sean Feltibone's "In Between The Lines" (which is good), but there's no questioning that "Above + Beyond" is still somewhat derivative of IBIL with

regard to its layout. I don't know whether I can fault Tom or Adobe PageMaker for this (so I'll just blame Sean! heh heh...), but one thing's for sure... A+B is a more focused fanzine than IBIL, with topics more relevant to video games. Tom issues a heartfelt plea to game companies to return to the simpler days of gaming in an editorial appropriately titled "Simplicity", dissects over a dozen pro magazines, and tops the issue off with a ton of fanzine reviews. A+B is both poignant and thoughtfully written, making its semi-punk layout seem perplexingly out of place. ☺

DENIAL #1

Jeff Daniels

Hey, a newsletter devoted to the VIC-20! I can live with that. Being the premiere issue (and the first 'zine of its kind), "Denial" is bound to have growing pains... the layout's a little bland, the photos are overly dark, and the writing could use some polishing. But if you're even remotely fond of the home computer which made Commodore a household name, you'll be very pleased with Jeff's reviews of "Robohom:2084" (yep, there was a VIC-20 version of that, believe it or not) and "Demon Attack". This is also one of the few EG fanzines with a game included... it's a page-long type-in program called "Squeak", starring a lab rat which must nibble on plants while avoiding a shower of hypodermic needles. The concept of type-in programs (especially ones as good as "Squeak") adds a lot of promise to future issues of this ambitious publication. ☺

Video Zone #21

Chris Kohler

"Wheel out the electronic birthday cake!" I see Amie renewed his subscription to the "Cliche" Of the Month Club... Suuuu combal "Fandom Scope" review opens aside, this 3rd anniversary issue is as one would expect chock full of Chris' humorous (smart-alecky?) comments and scathing reviews. Not that that's a bad thing, of course... A.A. Spastic Kohler hits the nail right on the head with his assessments of "The Art of Fighting" and "Killer Instinct", although

"Gamin' Gossip" (by Nickelmann? Or yey...) was a little disturbing, and "The GMS Test" (as funny as it was) indicates that Chris isn't quite finished beating the dead horse that is Greg Meyers. Good stuff overall, but did you HAVE to print that picture of "Beat 'Em & Eat 'Em" in your emulator reviews? And I thought the Yoshi picture in "The Dark Side" was bad... ☺

9ΠΓΞΤΑΤΙ•Ν #15

AΛAN ΛΑΝΘΣ

Alan's bizarre writing style and desktop publishing software... two great tastes that taste great together! It's nice to have Alan back, and it's even nicer that you don't have to call in a cryptologist to read the latest issue of "Intestation", since Al got his hands on a Pentium with all the himmings and attached the Smith-Corona and that blotchy pen he bought at the family Dollar. Despite my crappy reviews (sorry, Alan...), this is no doubt the best issue of "Intestation" yet. Oh, and did I mention the cool back cover? The guy who drew that must be one heckuvan artist... >:) ☺

Digital Press #31D

Joe Santulli

They just keep on comin', don't they? Chris Kohler made the interesting observation that DP is the "McDonald's of fandom". I'd further this metaphor by calling it the Arch Deluxe of EG fandom: it's a little overhyped, and it won't appeal to everyone, but it's meaty, has an enticing flavor, and comes on a fluffy potato roll. Or something like that. Anyway, this is DP's summer extravaganza, and it's chock full of all the usual columns you've come to expect from the fanzine alongside such interesting tidbits as the return of "Fantasmagoria", staff profiles, and reviews of some really obscure video games. If you're a fan of "Digital Press", you'll be as pleased with this issue as you were the other 31,694. ☺

GAME MAG #24

JON RATCLIFFE

Jon kicks off a two year
(Can't On Last Page)

THE RE-VIEW MIRROR

Bosconian (MSX)

It's a pity this Namco sleeper never became as popular as its Williams counterpart "Sinistar", because judging from my experience with the MSX version (or more specifically, the FMX version, but that's a long story and one which I'll discuss in detail in the next issue), this quirky shooter deserved far more attention than it ever received in the early 80's. You are cast as the pilot of the Star Destroyer, a powerful Galaga-ish ship with the unenviable task of destroying space stations bristling with defensive systems. There are two ways to eliminate these stations: take out each of their six habitat bubbles, or the more delicate process of sending laser shots directly into their cores. As stations are destroyed, your opposition grows, and enemies begin to swarm around you in an attempt to distract you from your mission. Ship formations also "Time Pilot" and types also appear at random intervals, swading skilled players with bonus points should either be destroyed. In other words, it's your typical shooter from the early 80's, which is by no means a bad thing... in fact, the ability to hunt down your enemies is a refreshing change of pace in a genre inundated with forced-scrolling blastfests. The mono-colored sprites are a real turn-off (and quite unnecessary, judging from later MSX releases), but that aside fans of the arcade original will find much to like about this sterling translation. ☺

and confusing play mechanics... it's overly difficult to drop down from one ledge to another, the weapons selection system is needlessly complicated (owners of the six button arcade pad should have been able to select items on the fly, since Sisko can only hold three of them, but they too must hold down the C button to access their tricorder or phaser pistol), and punching is as futile as Dole's bid for the presidency in 1996. Needless to say, I don't recommend this to fans of the series, or for that matter, anyone else. ☹

Cosmic Crisis (ColecoVision)

"Cosmic Crisis"... "Space Panic"... get it? I'd like to say that there was no need for the Bit Corporation to release a shameless clone of this unpoplar "Lode Runner" ancestor, but I honestly can't, as this improves upon Coleco's translation of "Space Panic" in several crucial ways. First, the graphics are far and away better than "Space Panic's"... the title character is larger and more detailed, and so are the various aliens he's sworn to destroy. The sound effects are much less annoying than those in "Space Panic", and "Cosmic Crisis" control is more reliable as well. Despite all this, "Cosmic Crisis" doesn't hold a candle to the ultimate ColecoVision game in this genre, "Mr. Do's Castle", so I recommend you buy or download that first. ☺

STAR TREK: DEEP SPACE NINE (GENESIS)

I've had to put up with more than my share of generic, uninspired, and outright terrible Genesis games in the last two years thanks to Sega's disastrous mishandling of the system, but "Deep Space Nine" is insulting to me as both a Genesis fan and a DS9 fan, and that is just inexcusable. None of the charm and charisma from the series is captured in this no-frills side-scrolling adventure... although there's a little dialogue, the characters look exactly alike save for some barely distinguishable faces, and the bulk of the game concentrates around Sisko's having to perform ridiculously manual tasks like diffusing Bajoran grenades left scattered around the station. This wouldn't be quite so bad if it weren't for the lousy control

Blaster Master (NES)

One of the games that set the standard for the NES, "Blaster Master" still holds up fairly well for its age, with wonderfully detailed backgrounds, solid control, and a quest as long as the game's various bosses are gigantic. Everything about this game was way ahead of its time, although on the other hand it did have its annoying quirks... there's too much backtracking required to get to the later stages, and in some areas it's very easy to stick yourself into a predicament from which there is no escape. Take the water stage for instance. You start out on a small island just above a vast ocean, and since Sophia (your character's wheels, not the old crane from "Golden Girl") cannot reach the surface of a body of water without stepping stones, you naturally keep her as close to that island as possible, taking Sophia to a series of blocks that only she can destroy,

then diving in yourself to find and defeat the next boss. Problem is, once you've done this and attempt to return to your vehicle and the end of the stage, you discover that the row of blocks has reappeared, effectively blocking your passage to Sofia which could be just inches away. Meh, heh. Thanks, Sunsoft! But that really is a minor complaint. There's still plenty of good 'ol fashioned gameplay here for those of you sick of the mindless 3-D games so prevalent on today's systems, so check it out when you've got the chance. ☺

DUKE NUKEM 3-D (PC)

Speak of the devil... in case you haven't already gotten tired of "Doom" clones for your PC, here's "Duke Nukem 3-D", a very loose sequel to the side-scrolling "Duke Nukem" series of games. There's not a whole lot of differences between this and "Doom", "Wolfenstein 3-D", "Blake Stone", etc. but there are several nice touches which set it apart from those games. For instance, there was more effort put into making the rounds more distinct and believable than those in "Doom" and especially Wolf 3-D... it feels like you're actually exploring a world instead of a maze with cardboard walls, as sections of the playfield don't just disappear once you've completed them. You can actually look out the windows of a five story building and see the city streets below, where you'd began that particular round. The realism doesn't stop there, folks... the buildings themselves have multiple rooms including bathrooms, prison cells, and arcades (!), and like in real life, they have true definition, quite unlike the box-shaped structures of Wolf 3-D. You can even blow up items inside these rooms to reveal hidden areas or ambush enemies, although regrettably some of them (like the urinals in the bathrooms) are sexure-mapped to the walls and don't look all that convincing. Put simply, "Duke Nukem 3-D" offers everything you could possibly ask for in a "Doom" clone... that is, if you haven't already had your fill of them. ☺

Galaxian (ColecoVision)

When I'd first gotten this game, I was amazed at how close it was to the Namco original... from the arcade-style font and smooth gameplay to the beautifully animated, multi-colored enemies, it was hard to believe that a translation of this quality was possible on a system so plagued with lousy coin-op conversions. Now that I own Dave Spiller's arcade game emulator and the ROMs required to run it, I appreciate Atanoli's translation of "Galaxian" for the various subtle ways it differs from Namco's classic... it's got a really nice title screen (which is conspicuously absent in the

"WipEoT's" incredible artwork, but its frustrating, impracticable gameplay will absolutely drive you nuts. ☹

Area 51 (Arcade)

I had no interest whatsoever in this game after watching its attract mode, but nevertheless forced myself to play it after a dumbfounding recommendation by my brother, a former devotee of SNK's "Beat Blasters" and "Tato's Operation Wolf". Although I wouldn't say that I was wrong to avoid it, I now understand what he finds so appealing about this mildly entertaining blastfest: "Area 51's" primary attraction is its constantly changing 3-D perspective... most gun games scroll from left to right, but "Area 51" puts you in the center of the action with a playfield that scales in and pivots like the dickens, without the rough polygons of "Virtua Cop" or the blocky texture-mapping of "Doom". The guns themselves are another highlight... they're light, fit comfortably in one's hand, and are reasonably accurate (although the designers saw fit to seal the game screen in a large cabinet to prevent players from being, er, a little too accurate, if you get my drift...). Other than that, there's not much that can be said in "Area 51's" defense... it's certainly fun, but if you're looking for revolutionary graphics, gameplay, sound, etc. you won't find them here. ☹

Pilotwings 64 (N64)

I remember the hype that surrounded this game when it was one of the Super NES's initial releases. "Wowee! Look at all that glorious scaling and rotation (never mind the fact that it's easier to get a pilot's license than to control the characters...)! You'll never see anything like THAT on the Genesis!" Oh, blow me. Anyway, I don't know whether people have come to their senses or all of the N64's other releases have been overshadowed by "Super Mario 64", but mercifully, "Pilotwings 64" hasn't been nearly as well accepted as its predecessor. There's no doubt in my mind that P64 is a better game, however, and that's not just because the visuals are a hop, skip, and a light year ahead of "Pilotwings"... the analog thumbstick adds the all-important element of precision control to what is after all a pared-down flight simulator, and the complex level structure gives players an incentive to explore the game's various objectives and explore its vast, detailed landscapes. Still, many of the first game's annoyances have been retained in the sequel... it's still too easy to crash into the ground while using the pedicopter, and some of the events are too demanding, given their difficulty and the

player's tendency to overcompensate for mistakes. Even at its current size, there are better games in the N64 software library than "Pilotwings 64," although frankly, P64 is more fun than the eye-catching but terminally dull "Wave Race 64." ☹

SHATTERHAND (NES)

After several resounding commercial failures (remember "Shadow of the Ninja" or "Abadox"? Of course not...), Natsume finally hit the nail on the head with this entertaining side-scrolling action title. You are the macho, bionically enhanced soldier Leonard "Pee Wee" Herman, and your mission is to foil an evil dictator's plans of world domination by, er, uh, beating the crap out of his minions or something like that. Sorry, I didn't pay much attention to the instruction booklet. Anyway, Herman is armed with a pair of iron fists which allow him to literally knock human opponents offscreen, and can call upon one of several robots for protection once he assembles them from parts spread throughout each of the game's six rounds. Even better, if he can assemble the same robot twice, Herman merges with his creation to become an unstoppable super mech for about ten seconds. The game's plot and play mechanics reek of familiarity (you'll be hard-pressed to find something in "Shatterhand" that hasn't already been done to death in "Ninja Gaiden", "Mega Man", or "Castlevania"), but there's no connecting the fact that "Shatterhand" was well done, with graphics and sound that are on par with the best the NES has to offer. ☹

Puzzle De Pon (Neo-Geo)

Replace the cutesy bubble blowing dragons from "Bust-A-Move" with a squeaky-voice little girl and its vibrant cotton-candy backgrounds with a high-tech astrological motif and you've got "Puzzle De Pon", the latest in a long line of sequels, derivatives, and outright rip-offs of Taito's popular puzzler. "Puzzle De Pon" is certainly better looking than "Bust-A-Move", with startlingly realistic playfield objects, and it does have add a twist to the BAM engine in that you've got to release pieces trapped within fields of bubbles, but without the "Bubble Bobble" characters there's just something missing. Nevertheless, it's just as engrossing as "Bust-A-Move", and with so much potential play time for one measly quarter, it's the best deal you'll find in the arcades next to "Killer Instinct 2". ☹

Killer Instinct 2 (Arcade)

This one's actually kind of a stretch as a choice for a science fiction video game, since technically, this takes place in the past, well before the first "Killer Instinct". It seems that dumping Eyedol into that pit of molten metal wasn't such a good idea, as his destruction literally ripped the fabric of time, sucking Ultratech Corporation and most of the cast of KI into the past. Being the iniquitous conglomerate that it is, Ultratech takes advantage of the situation by conquering most of the still-primitive world and designing a new Fulgore prototype to defend itself from potential dissidents. They obviously didn't design him well enough, because KI2 is ludicrously easy for an arcade game. "How easy?" Well, I consider myself an average "Street Fighter 2" player and well below average at "Killer Instinct", but I was able to play KI2 from beginning to end with one credit, playing as a character I'd never tried before and using a joystick that had a tendency to stick. I pity anyone who has mastered the combos from the first KI... if it weren't for the barbarian Tusk, this game wouldn't pose an even remote challenge to them. But the difficulty (or lack of it) really isn't an issue for me - in fact, I appreciate that I get more game for my money than I had with the first "Killer Instinct". What's important is that KI2 improves upon its predecessor in a number of ways: the gameplay is far more responsive, and there are a lot of neat graphic flourishes which add considerably to the game's visual appeal. Overall, I feel that KI2 is a great introduction to the series for novice players, but experienced gamers will probably want to stick with the original if just for its more formidable AI. ☹

PENGU (Genesis Prequel)

OK, so this really has nothing at all to do with the theme of the issue, but hey, I promised you a "Pengo" review, so that's exactly what you're gonna get. I'd hoped that this would be a sterling translation of Sega's charming arcade game with improved graphics, but that just isn't the case. This, er, version of "Pengo" has far more in common with Hudson Soft's "Bomberman" series, replacing its bombs with ice cubes and crystals and the trademark "Bomberman" enemies with snowmen and walrus-like seals (which this wog has dubbed "Arries"). I have the distinct feeling that Sega designed this as something to fall back on in case negotiations for "Mega Bomberman" fell flat... Fortunately, a Genesis version of "Bomberman" *did* become a reality, and while that game is not without its flaws, it beats Sega's shameless clone hands down. ☹

El Libro

Luckily for you, I don't have enough room to write an opener, so I'll just let you know about a helpful service that many libraries offer their members. The interloan program allows you to search for literature in a large cooperative of libraries, at little or no cost to you. It's the easiest way to find the books reviewed here, so by all means ask your local library about it. Now back to CBS Storybreak...

The Winners' Book of Video Games
Craig Kubey
Warner Books
270 pages

Despite the author's fondness for the word "awesome", and the constant reference to the saucers in "Asteroids" as Wally and the Beaver, this is a pretty entertaining book. Craig's coverage of arcade games is top-notch: it's both informative and humorous, with entertaining sidenotes (for instance, the author goes into detail about a trio of donut shop employees who designed several "Pac-Man" patterns. I'm still not sure why, but the additional information is entertaining nevertheless) and plenty of opinions to go around. The home game reviews are equally inspired... Craig (like most classic game collectors) is not especially fond of the Magnavox Odyssey², and he isn't afraid to make that abundantly clear with scathing and absolutely hilarious reviews of "Computer Golf" and "Alien Invaders: Plus!" (or as he calls them, "Computer Golf" and "Space Invaders: Minus!"). All is not perfect with "The Winner's Book of Video Games". Kubey wastes time with a video game quiz (although the question about George Plimpton was pretty funny) and he occasionally makes comments that are alternately patronizing and tasteless—but overall, the book is still worth reading. ☺

Score! Beating the Top 16 Video Games
Ken Uston
Signet Publishing
194 pages

I'm telling you, people, this book is da bomb. I loved reading "Score!" as a child, and surprisingly enough, Ken Uston's authoritative guide to arcade games has only improved with age. All your favorites from the early 80's (and a few obscurities, such as "Star Castle" and "Make Trax") are covered in pristine detail here, with strategies for both novice and experienced players and an incredibly helpful "Video-Graph" which gives readers an idea how well they're doing at all sixteen games (according to the graph, I'm an expert at "Pac-Man" and "Ms. Pac-Man", and a novice at "Donkey Kong"... c'mon, the arcade version is hard!). The writing is typical of Ken Uston—intelligent with a reserved sense of humor—and even the interior artwork is helpful, with cleanly drawn game screens and control panel layouts for each title. Here's the bottom line: if you regularly play older arcade games, or even their ColecoVision, S200, or Vectrex counterparts, you've gotta have this book. It's that simple. ☺

Ken Uston's Guide to Buying & Beating the Home Video Games
Ken Uston
Signet Publishing
675 pages (wow!)

Despite Ken Uston's diligence in compiling a huge list of reviews of games for every programmable game system released in the late 70's, this guide comes up short for a variety of reasons. First, it's very old, so only the 2600, Odyssey², Astrocade, Fairchild Channel F, and Intellivision are covered. The ColecoVision and S200 are mentioned in passing, but (if this is any indication as to how old the guide really is) neither are given definite names. Secondly, judging from the reviews, it appears as though Ken has never met a game he didn't like... even Todd Fry's horrific translation of "Pac-Man" and just about every game in the Fairchild Channel F library were spared hostile reviews (I'd like to see Joe Santilli's reaction to that!). It's ridiculous! Don't get me wrong—I have the highest respect for Ken Uston's work, but I just can't recommend this. ☹

How To Win At Video Games: A Complete Guide
George Sullivan
Scholastic Publishing
175 pages

I wasn't terribly enthused about "How To Win At Video Games", but if you're desperate and can't find any of the other books I've reviewed, you might want to give it a try nevertheless. George Sullivan dedicates most of this Scholastic release to popular arcade games from the early 80's, but there's a little home game coverage as well (it's not good coverage, mind you, but it's there). Also submitted for your disapproval are a list of excuses to use at your favorite arcade (which was shamelessly ripped off from Ken Uston's "Mastering Pac-Man"), a video game quiz (hopelessly outdated, even as a test of your knowledge of the oldest), and some other odds and ends which are of negligible value. The writing is merely adequate, and the pictures (draw representations of actual game screens... yeech!) are lackluster, but to its credit, "How To Win" isn't patronizing, and the arcade coverage is somewhat informative. Still, you won't find anything in this book that Craig Kubey and Ken Uston haven't already covered in greater detail. ☹

How To Win at Nintendo
Jeff Rovin
St. Martin's Press
147 pages

Arguably the first unofficial guide to the Nintendo Entertainment System, this little black book adequately covers a wide variety of games for that system, but generally pales in comparison to Nintendo's own full-color guide which was released at about the same time. There are a wealth of tips, passwords, and strategies for the games covered in "How To Win", but without pictures or maps, adopting the strategies listed for complex titles like "Solomon's Key" is next to impossible. There are brief reviews at the end of each section as well, but they too are of little use to players, since it's obvious that Rovin holds back in his appraisals of bombs like "Friday the 13th". Overall, "How To Win At Nintendo" isn't a complete disappointment, but older issues of "Nintendo Power" remain a better source of NES information. ☺



WINDOWS 95

After endless delays, Windows95 hit the PC market just in time to deserve its trendy title. It's now 1997, and despite flaws in the operating system that have required two updates to repair, most PC users have made the switch from Win 3.x and MS-DOS to Win95. Was the breakout success of Windows95 due to an aggressive ad campaign and the public's blind trust in technological "progress", or are there enough genuine improvements to the Windows engine in Win95 to consider it an intelligent purchase? Yes. Truth is, while the latest version of Windows offers users a more intuitive interface (with, surprise, surprise, plenty of features stolen from Apple's System 7.0) and smoother DOS performance, its extravagant feature requirements and bug-ridden design makes juggling with Windows 3.x a sweet sorrow.

One of the most annoying things about Win95 is that its features sound great in theory but don't always work in practice. Take its set-up program, for instance. It graciously offers to detect hardware add-ons for you, only to warn you that "Windows may lock up while detecting hardware. If there is no hard drive activity for several minutes, reset and try again." Believe me, it's not just saying this to be cautious... it happens. Even if the set-up program works, there's no guarantee that Windows95 will. "Out of Order" signs are peppered around the computer lab at my local college, and the culprit is almost always Win95. That's measurable when you consider the number of computers which worked perfectly with Windows 3.x.

As for the claim that MS-DOS applications and older Windows programs work better with Win95, it's true... sort of. Win95's 32-bit processing adds some zip to software written for older versions of Windows, but they won't always work properly under the new environment. The same goes with DOS applications. Most of them will work just as well from Win95 as they would in MS-DOS, but games and other programs with graphics must still run in a full screen, and games which use both high and low resolution graphics have a peculiar habit of crashing Windows.

The verdict is still out on Windows95... is it worth the \$50, and moreover, the time it takes to learn a new operating system? It depends. If you're considering the investment just to take advantage of Microsoft's Win95 exclusives, forget it... they're inferior to products by competitors like Quicken and Novell. However, novice computer users may take to its speedy DOS performance and similarities to Apple's notoriously friendly Mac OS series. If you do upgrade, just keep an older version of Windows handy in case your new operating system spooks you...

MICROSOFT INTERNET EXPLORER

This is a tale of two programs, Microsoft

Windows 95: These Clouds DON'T Have Silver Linings

Internet Explorer 1.0 and its much-improved offspring, version 3.0. Although MSE 3.0 is the latest update and can be downloaded from the Microsoft web site at no cost, it's worth taking a look at the original simply because Microsoft has foolishly included it with current Win95 upgrade packages. What can I say? In direct comparison to Netscape 1.0, MSE 1.0 falls far on its face in performance and visual flair. With its shameless lack of features and an interface replete with tiny, simply drawn command buttons, you can't help but suspect that Microsoft punched Internet Explorer out in a week to cash in on the increasingly trendy and potentially lucrative Internet. Thankfully, MSE 3.0 appears to be more of a complete overhaul than a simple update. Its graphics are a vast improvement over 1.0's, and there are a wealth of helpful programs included that even the latest version of Netscape doesn't offer. Not bad for a freebie, eh? If you're itching to get on the World Wide Web and you're not interested in paying for a web browser (you cheap bastard), MSE 3.0 should more than suit your needs.

MICROSOFT WORD

In its own right, "Word" is a fine word processor with plenty of options... you can import artwork and text from a variety of formats, align and spell-check paragraphs on the fly, and even add frames and columns to pages. In the all-important categories of user friendliness and ease of use, however, "Word" doesn't hold a candle to its main competitor, Novell "WordPerfect 6.0" (and the more recently released Corel "WordPerfect Suite 7.0"). Two wonderful examples of this from my days as a computer lab assistant spring to mind... the first involved a young woman who'd needed to create a relatively simple document. She'd made the mistake of choosing "Word" for this task, and had no idea how to format the first few lines of the page. I'd suggested using "WordPerfect" instead, and after a brief explanation of its mechanics, she took to the program like it was designed just for her. Another, older woman had similar problems with "Word", but didn't have the option to use another word processor because her assignment had specifically requested it. I had to take her through nearly every step of her project. Visually computer users will have considerably less trouble with "Word", but it doesn't really matter. "WordPerfect" isn't just easier to use than "Word"... it's better.

MICROSOFT WORD

MICROSOFT VISUAL BASIC 3.0

Finally, a Microsoft product that's not overshadowed by another, far superior piece of third-party software. "Visual BASIC" is an exciting way to design your own Windows-compatible programs... once you understand its basic mechanics, the design time for programs is surprisingly short, and as an added bonus, everything from the fonts on the control buttons to the colors of the windows themselves can be customized. This is a refreshing change of pace after putting up with years of dull, utilitarian Windows applications... However (you could see this one coming from a mile away, couldn't you?), "Visual BASIC" is tough to learn if you're a veteran of Quick BASIC or another text-based programming language. There's as much dragging, dragging, and clicking as there is typing, and this can be very frustrating if you're not familiar with object-oriented programming. Also, programs written in Vis BASIC—even compiled ones—will not work in Windows without a DLL file supplied with the program, so you can forget about distributing your best creations to friends without including the DLL along with them. Even with these flaws, "Visual BASIC" is a great way to design everything from simple calculation programs to huge on-line reference guides. Now all they need to do is release a cheap beginner's edition with the graphics commands that made Quick BASIC so fun to use...

MICROSOFT EXCHANGE

Sure, "Microsoft Exchange" allows you to send integrated Email messages complete with multiple fonts, embedded images, and voice, but there's a catch. Wait... make that several catches. The worst of these is ME's absurd loading time. It can take you upwards of

two minutes to actually read your mail after clicking on Win95's in-box icon if your PC is networked... contrast that with the almost instantaneous load time of the PC version of Eudora Light and you've got a serious design flaw that even staunch Microsoft supporters can't ignore. Next on the list is Exchange's unattractive, no-frills interface. For a program that takes so long to load, you'd expect Exchange to offer the user more than two meekly windows filled with non-descript folders, but sadly, that's not the case. Finally (and this is most important), Exchange's advanced formatting features are completely useless if Email is sent to or from one of the dozens of Email readers on the market. In the end, you'd be tempted to know the time-honored cliché "you get what you pay for", but in true Microsoft fashion, the Win95 freebie is actually a step down from other freeware Email programs, like Quicken's Eudora Light.

MICROSOFT BOB

One of Geeky GUY's most dismal failures was this condescending GUI, a "revolutionary" integrated software package which was supposed to make PCs easier and more fun to use. Uh, right. I guess that perfectly explains why I couldn't do a damned thing in this graphically overloaded mess after having learned Windows 3.x with relative ease. Apparently, the designers had forgotten that the term "computer disaster" was a figure of speech, so they'd done everything within their power to keep the user from reading text prompts. The result? You'll be left stranded in the opening screen, desperately clicking on everything and having vague, cryptic conversations with "Bob", the cast of minor assistants until you either press control, alt, and delete (the traditional PC panic button) to escape or miraculously find a way out on your own. So much for "Bob's" ease of use. If you're desperate for a simple way to use your PC, you can take your chances with Book, or, "Bob", but in the end, you'll find it far wiser to bite the bullet and learn to use Windows.

MICROSOFT VISUAL BASIC 3.0

MICROSOFT EXCHANGE

Sure, "Microsoft Exchange" allows you to send integrated Email messages complete with multiple fonts, embedded images, and voice, but there's a catch. Wait... make that several catches. The worst of these is ME's absurd loading time. It can take you upwards of

GAME OVER

LISTEN UP, YOU!

And with this page I bring this science-fiction oriented issue of "The Gameroom Blitz" under wraps...er, wraps. Thanks to the theme of this issue, I wasn't able to review some of the truly exceptional games I'd recently played on a friend's Saturn, so I'll cover them here. "NIGHTS" is as good a place to start as any...it's a little shallow in comparison to, say, "Super Mario 64", but its astoundingly detailed surrealist graphics and unique, surprisingly intuitive gameplay help make up for this flaw. And by the way, Chibi, the game is 3-D if you're playing as one of the children, so you can keep those snarky comments to yourself...>3 Then there's "Daytona USA". It doesn't quite stack up to "Ridge Racer", with less impressive visuals and what could be the world's most obnoxious theme music ("Daytona Let's Go Away!") Please do...], but it's a fine game in its own right, and certainly better than its follow-up, "Sega Rally Championship". "Street Fighter Alpha" was, as expected, an almost exact translation of the popular coin-op, with perfect animation and great remakes of the original "Street Fighter 2" themes (Chun-Li is hilarious! It sounds like it'd be at home in a 70's exploitation film...). As accurate a conversion as SFA is, however, it just seems so glad in comparison to "Hyper Warriors", which has my vote as the best fighting game...ever. If you loved "Parkies" (and let's face it, who doesn't), this flawlessly executed sequel is enough to shift your drool glands into overdrive. There's just so much imagination and attention to detail in the backgrounds, characters, and attacks that it's hard to imagine how anyone could ever tire of the game, especially when you're playing against a friend in the versus mode.

On a less pleasant note, it seems that it's a holiday tradition for me to reluctantly skim through a copy of EGM's annual Buyer's Guide, only to feed it into a paper shredder after reading its editor's constantly low opinions of the Sega Genesis. Certainly, the number of truly worthwhile games for the system has went from a steady stream to a trickle in the last two years, and with the advent of the Playstation and the Saturn, even I couldn't recommend buying one, but that's not the point. What angers me is that the assorted fruits and nuts of EGM have tagged the system with all kinds of unfair labels year after year while completely ignoring the games which shatter their narrow-minded stereotypes. Remember the accolades EGM gave the SNES version of "Futur" in its review section? Isn't it funny that Senda just happened to target about the Genesis version of the game, with its unquestionably better controls? And how about all of the ground-breaking releases for the Genesis which EGM refused to give their proper due, like "Streets of Rage 2" and "Lands of Mystery"? Or, when there was a Genesis release that the filthy rag couldn't ignore, all the times that Samson-Burns-X negated everyone else's high marks with a low rating in an obvious attempt to keep the game from receiving an Editor's Choice Award? OK, OK...I realize that I've complained more than enough about this in the four years I've been in EG-land, but EGM's blatantly obvious bias has never failed to incense me, and thinking about its near-absolute influence over kids who will no doubt be brainwashed into hating the Genesis frustrates me even more. Folks...read an issue of EGM sometime. Look at the plus-poor layout, read the lazy, detached writing, and try to make out the grainy, blurred pictures. Then play "Gunstar Heroes". You'll realize that the Genesis has accomplished far more as a game system than EGM ever has as a professional gaming magazine.

In fact, now that I think about it, I haven't read too many game magazines lately, and it's been ever since I've actually bought one. If I were to run out and purchase a pro game rag right this instant, however, it would probably be either "Video Games: Tips & Tricks" or "Game On! USA". "Tips & Tricks" has actually surpassed its sister publication in the way of content, with great strategy guides to such games as "King of Fighters '96" and that weird, yet strangely appealing bad page by Betty Halack (what is with her obsession with Japanese snack foods, anyway?). Guess I'll have to ask Beniek about it...]. Then there's "Game On! USA", which as Tom Donohoe already noted goes way overboard with the manga twist but has a passion for video games unmatched by most professional publications. Its focus on Japanese artwork is a fresh approach to the topic as well, although I have to argue with their decision to prominently display Dural from the "Virtua Fighter" games on the cover of the latest issue...a computer-generated metallic being doesn't exactly capture the essence of anime and manga if you ask me.

Anyway, I'm a little pressed for space so I'd better make an important announcement before I officially sign off. The next edition of "The Gameroom Blitz" will focus on revamped classics such as "G-Sert 3" for the SNES, "Galaga '90" for the TurboGrafx-16, "Space Invaders '91" for the Genesis, and "Gyrus" for the NES...if you've got any particular favorites that fall into this category, send reviews or commentary about those games to the address on the back of the issue. I guarantee you that all relevant submissions will be used. And of course, if you have ANY comments about the premiere of GR3, even negative ones, it's your duty as a fan-ed to send them my way (hey, I've tried everything else to get feedback :). I guess that about does it. Scooty, one to beam up...

Jess Ragon

In the next exciting edition of "The Gameroom Blitz"...

- ★ Reviews of your favorite classic game rereleases, from "Pac-Man 3" to "Super Mario 64"
- ★ The Top 100 Video Games Of All Time
- ★ More reviews of video game books from that decade of decades, the 1980s
- and... (drum roll, please)
- ★ Josh Lesnick returns to EG fandom in a "Gameroom Blitz" exclusive!

All this and more... coming this Spring



(*Zona Warner Newsletters, continued)

anniversary with another suit-and-tie issue of "Game Mag". I've gotta tell you, Jon and staffer John T. Rex (gee, I wonder if that's a pseudonym...) dish up some great reviews of new releases and imports like "King of Fighters '95", and Ms. Ratacliff even takes a critical look at the N64 (something few fans-eds have bothered to do), but the lighthearted atmosphere that makes 'zines like "Video Zone" so fun to read just isn't here. The detailed reviews and smart, to the point editorials make GM worthwhile, but until Jon lightens up a bit and lets himself write without reservations, "Game Mag" will never be a true game lounge. ☿

Digital Savior #2

Kevin Cline

Mix equal parts "Shining Forth", "Game Mag", and Casey Lee's "Next Generation" (the original NG, not the one written by those jerks who bash 2-D fighting games and worship the N64 at every given opportunity), and the results would probably resemble

this well-done but somewhat generic publication, brought to you by Kevin Cline and nearly a dozen other young upstarts. For a second issue, "Digital Savior" is very impressive... Kew manages to cram over a dozen long game synopses (mostly of imports and new releases, although there is the obligatory "I Hate Earthbound" review included as well) and an E! report into the mix, and the coverage is all pretty good. It could look better, though... the layout is a bit bland, the cover could use a lot of work, and the pictures of DS's staffers at E! are about as flattering as your average driver's license photo, but at the rate "Digital Savior" is improving, none of this will be a problem in the next issue. ☿

Bishoujo Mamono Hunter Senshi Yumi-Chan #1

Josh Leenick

Aw, geez... the title of Josh's latest comic is so freaking large, I don't have room to write an actual review of it! Heh, heh... just kidding. Puf simply,

if you liked Josh's work in the action-adventure serial "Ryukin", you'll enjoy this parody of such anime! mainstays as "Ranma 1/2", "Sailor Moon", and "Project A-Ko" as well. On the plus side, "Yumi-Chan"'s artwork is more consistent than "Ryukin"'s, but the water-thin plot may be somewhat of a turn-off to fans of Josh's last series. In any case, "Bishoujo Mamono" etc. etc. is still worth a look. ☿

The Dark Side (\$1.50) Infestation (\$1.50)

Above + Beyond (\$2) Digital Press (\$1.75)

Dental (\$1.50) Game Mag (\$1.50)

Video Zone (\$1.50) Digital Savior (\$2)

Bishoujo Mamono Yumi Chan (\$1.50)

THE GAMEROOM BUTZ

YOU'RE RIGHT, MULDER...
THAT THING CAN'T
POSSIBLY BE HUMAN...

Hey, disgruntled postal guy! Before you pick up that BM-B, mail this bad boy to...

LEGAL-ESE

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If you can
read this, your
brain will
self-destruct
in five
seconds. Have
a nice day
xxxxxxxxxxxx

